



X-Plain™

Massage Therapy

Reference Summary

Massage therapy is the manipulation of the soft tissues of the body, including the skin, tendons, muscles and connective tissue by a professional, for relaxation or to enhance the body's own healing capability.

Whether you are thinking of getting a massage or already benefit from it, this health tutorial will help you understand massage therapy better.

Throughout this reference summary, you will find out what massage therapy is, its benefits, risks, and what to expect during and after a massage.



What Is Massage Therapy?

More than half the body's weight is muscle. The main role of muscles is to help the body move.

Muscles also give the body its shape and help protect internal organs. Tendons attach muscles to bones.

Nerves connect muscles to the brain. For a voluntary muscle to move, the brain must send it a signal through the nerve.

When a muscle receives a signal from a nerve, the muscle contracts and pulls the tendon. This makes the bone that the muscle is attached to move.

Connective tissue refers to ligaments, tendons and other tissues that connect and separate different organs and parts of the body. Ligaments attach muscles to other structures of the body.

The following factors can cause muscles and connective tissue to become stiff and sore.

- Movements done over and over, repeatedly
- Too much pull on the muscle
- Not being active
- Stress
- Bad posture
- Injuries
- Surgery

Massage is the manipulation of muscles and their tendons, ligaments, and other connective tissue by applying pressure to the body.

Scientists do not know exactly why massage therapy works for so many people. However, there is evidence of physical, physiological and psychological reasons for its success.

Physical. Pressure on the skin can loosen stiff muscles and connective tissue. Heat can also loosen stiff muscles. Some massage technique use heating pads and rapid hand friction to heat the muscles.

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Physiological. Massage therapy can help the body release certain chemicals. These chemicals help us relax, improve blood circulation and get rid of toxic substances that build up in our muscles as they work.

Psychological. Many people who get massages feel better taken care of because of the touch and contact with the therapist.

Relaxation with massage may improve the immune system. The body's immune system fights off germs and sickness. When the body is stressed, the immune system is less able to fight off disease.

There are many types of massage therapy. Each one is based on different techniques and some include a spiritual component. This tutorial does not discuss all the different types of massage.

Benefits

Most people use massage to relax and to loosen stiff, sore muscles.

Massage therapy can also improve the circulation of blood and lymph. Lymph is a milky, white substance that moves waste products out of body tissues.

Since massage stretches and relaxes muscles, and moves joints, the joints become easier to move and the range of motion is increased.

Massage therapy may promote the recovery from fatigue and reduce minor pains.

Massage therapy stimulates the glands of the skin. Skin glands keep the skin cool and moisturized.

Massage may also help boost the immune system.

Risks

Massage therapy is generally safe. However, it can be dangerous in certain cases. This section discusses the risks.

If you have a blood vessel disease, check with your doctor before having a massage. If there is a clot in a vein, massage therapy could cause the clot to move. If a blood clot moves to the lungs, it can be fatal.

If you have a cardiovascular disease, you should also check with your doctor before having a massage. Cardiovascular diseases include swollen blood vessels, blood clots and heart disease.

You should not be massaged on a burn, infected skin, herpes or cold sores, bruises, swellings or open cuts.

If you have severe back pain, you should check with your doctor before having a massage.

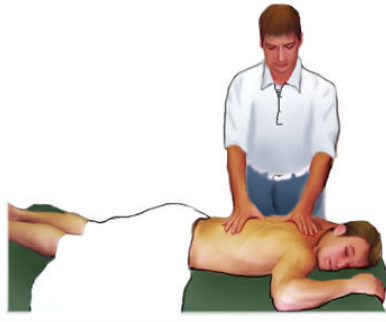
If you have a high fever or chills, you should check with a doctor because these could be signs of a serious illness.

Generally, during the first three months of pregnancy, the abdomen, legs and feet should not be massaged. This is when the risk of miscarriage is highest. However, a massage therapist with specialized training in pregnancy massage may be able to provide massage of the feet and lower legs. If you are pregnant, check with your doctor first.

If you broke a bone and it did not heal, that area should not be massaged. Generally, people with weak bones, a condition called osteoporosis, should avoid massage therapy. However, those with mild osteoporosis as a natural part of aging may still benefit from massage. If you have osteoporosis, check with your doctor before having massage therapy.

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If you are not sure whether massage is right for you, check with your doctor before getting a massage.



It is important to tell the massage therapist if you feel pain during a massage. A massage should never be painful.

Before The Massage

This section discusses things to consider before getting a massage.

Health insurance does not always pay for massage therapy. You should check your insurance policy if you are not sure. Sometimes insurance only covers massage if a doctor prescribes it.

When choosing a massage therapist, make sure that he or she graduated from an accredited massage training program. Also, find out whether he or she has a state license or registration or a professionally-recognized certification .

Decide if you would prefer a male or female therapist. You can tell the scheduler when you call if you have a preference.

When you call to schedule, you will need to specify how long you want your massage to be. Sessions are usually 30, 60 or 90 minutes. Thirty minutes is usually not long enough for a full body massage.

A full body massage usually includes the upper back, lower back and gluteal muscles,

abdomen, legs and feet, arms and hands, neck and shoulder, and head. Usually a 30-minute session focuses on specific areas such as the back, neck, legs or shoulders.

During a massage, you should not be touched on or near your genitals. Females should not be touched on the breasts.

There are more than 200 kinds of massage therapy! The differences are:

- The technique
- The level of pressure and force applied
- The use of lotions and powders
- The theory or school of thought

Swedish massage is the most common type of massage in the United States. It includes long, smooth strokes and kneading movements. The therapist gradually increases pressure applied with his or her hand, arm or elbow. Oil or lotion is usually used.



Sports Massage is another type of massage. It is typically used before, during, and after athletic events. If you have never had a massage, Swedish massage is a good one to try first. You will discover what you like and dislike.

It is good to try several types of massage and decide which one you like most. You may also want to try a couple different therapists.

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Therapists can differ quite a bit, even if they offer the same type of massage.

People that provide sexual services sometimes hide behind a “massage parlor” business. However, it is easy to tell the difference between these places and professional massage therapists. Accredited massage study programs, licensing and certification requirements and ethical standards for massage therapists have made massage therapy more trustworthy over the last 20 years.

A massage therapy session is a time to relax. When you schedule a massage, arrange it so you are not interrupted by a cell phone or pager.

Allow time to relax before a massage. A steam bath, hot tub or sauna can help you relax. They soften your muscles, making your massage more effective.

Do not eat right before a massage.

During a massage, your therapist may play soft, soothing music. If you have a tape or CD that relaxes you, take it along!

Massage therapists usually have a tight schedule. Make sure to be on time! If you are getting a massage for the first time, arrive 10 minutes early because you will need to fill out a form about your medical history.

Questions you should be prepared to answer include:

- Are you under the care of any doctor, chiropractor or other healthcare professional? If yes, what medical condition(s) are they treating?
- Are you taking any medications? If yes, what are you taking?

- Why did you come for massage therapy? What results do you expect?

Other questions include:

Do you have any of the following

- high blood pressure
- osteoporosis
- diabetes
- an infection
- a recent injury
- cancer
- a fever
- epilepsy
- varicose veins
- heart disease
- a bleeding disorder
- hypertension
- arthritis
- a skin condition
- Leg swelling
- Are you pregnant?
- Are you on a medication that thins your blood? If yes, which one?

You may also need to sign an informed consent form. This is a way for you to give permission to the therapist to give you a massage. It shows that you understand what a massage involves.

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Informed consent forms may say:

"I understand that massage therapy is not intended as a substitute for a medical examination and is not designed to diagnose a medical condition, offer a medical treatment or prescribe medications."

"I understand that a massage should not be done when certain medical conditions exist, and I have informed the therapist of my current medical condition."

"I acknowledge that I need to tell the therapist if the pressure or strokes are too hard or cause pain."

An informed consent form might also say:

"I waive any claim against the therapist and assume all risks of injuries that may result."

"I understand that massage therapy is a therapeutic healing art and not a sexual service."

The informed consent form you fill out during your first visit usually applies to all of your visits with the massage therapist.

If you miss an appointment, you may still have to pay for it. Check your therapist's policy before you miss or cancel an appointment.

During The Massage

A massage usually takes place in a warm and quiet room. There may be soft music to help you relax. The massage therapist might also light candles or dim the lights.



Tell the therapist what you prefer. If you do not like the music, ask to have it changed or turned off. If the room is too cold or warm, the temperature can be adjusted.

Let your therapist know if your medical condition has changed since the last time you visited. He or she will probably ask if you are feeling any pain, tender muscles or stress.

The therapist will leave the room while you undress. People are usually massaged without clothes on, while covered with a sheet.

It is your decision whether you want to completely undress. Whatever you decide, you should always be appropriately covered during a massage.

You should remove any jewelry that might interfere with your massage.

After you undress, you will lie down on the massage table with the sheet over you. The massage table is padded and has a special face rest. You usually start face down. You might have a few minutes to relax. Take deep breaths and clear your mind.

The therapist will knock on the door to make sure you are ready before coming in. He or she may adjust the face rest, put bolsters for support or place heating pads to relax your muscles.

During your massage, the therapist will say, "turn, lift your arm, lift your leg or take a deep breath" when you need to. Ask any questions you have.

It is important to tell the therapist what you like and do not like. If he or she is using too much pressure, let them know right away. There is no way for the therapist to know what you are feeling.

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On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is gentle and 10 is extremely painful, the massage therapist should use pressure between 4 and 8. Even so, you have to say what feels right to you.

You may feel more comfortable talking during your massage. If so, go ahead and talk or ask questions. If you would rather just close your eyes and relax, that's fine too.

It is all right to sigh or breathe deeply during a massage. Taking deep breaths helps you relax, which makes the massage more effective.

Areas of your body will only be exposed when the therapist is working on them. Otherwise, most of your body will be covered. Your genital areas should be covered at all times during the treatment.

A light oil or lotion is usually used so the therapist can make smooth strokes. If you know that you are allergic to certain ingredients of oil or lotion, tell your therapist. He or she may ask you which oil you prefer.

Massage works best when you are relaxed. Relax and let the therapist do the work. If you resist, your therapist may ask you to relax and take it easy!

Do not think about your worries. Just focus on relaxing and enjoying the massage.

You might realize an area of your body is sore and you had not noticed before! Tell the therapist and he or she can work on it.

Your therapist might tell you the area to be worked on next. If there is an area you want him or her to skip, say so. For example, if you do not want your hair messed up, ask that your scalp not be worked on.

A few minutes before the end of your session, the therapist will leave the room so you can get dressed. Take your time getting up. Some

people feel dizzy after a massage. Sit up slowly and rest for 30 seconds or so before you stand up.

Sexually suggestive advances, such as asking the therapist to massage the genital areas, result in the session immediately ending. Massage therapists usually report such advances to the local police.

If anything happens during the massage that makes you feel uncomfortable, ask the therapist to stop. It is your right to end the massage at any time, for any reason.

After The Massage

Your massage therapist may ask that you drink a lot of water after your massage. Drinking plenty of water is always good for your body. This is especially true after a massage session because water helps flush out the muscle toxins.

Most massage therapists expect you to pay immediately after the massage.



Should you tip your therapist? Tipping practices are different in each community. In many places, you do not need to tip if the therapist is the business owner or works in a doctor's office. Find out whether other people who get massages in the area tip. If you do give a tip, 10 to 20% is traditional.

You will probably feel relaxed after your massage. You will also probably have a good range of motion in your joints. These effects of massage are usually short-term.

Massage therapy should not be a replacement for regular exercise, good nutrition and other

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ways to reduce stress that produce long-term effects.

Conclusion

Massage therapy helps many people relax, reduce muscle tension and feel better.

Massage therapy should not be expected to cure acute pain and illness. For these types of conditions, you should see a doctor for diagnosis and treatment.

Massage therapy is usually very safe. However, people with certain medical conditions should not have a massage.

Peoples from different civilizations have practiced massage therapy for hundreds and even thousands of years. In the last 2 centuries, massage became less common with the advance of medicine. Non-professional massage as a front for sexual services also confused many people about what was legitimate massage. But about 20 years ago, interest in massage surged again as its programs became accredited, therapists became licensed, and research to study its effectiveness was supported.

A successful massage starts with good communication. Find out the credentials of the therapist. Ask about his or her techniques. During the massage, be clear about what you like and what you do not like.

There are many types of massage in practice today. Experiment and find the one that fits your preferences.

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